

WALK IN THE PARK



A walk in the park is about distractions. When you take a walk, you're enjoying time to yourself. You may be looking at wildflowers, wildlife, or kids playing in the park. You may be talking with a friend or distracted by your dog's behavior. The point here is, you're not concentrating on your walking or balance. You're environmentally distracted and balance is automatic. Using distractions or dual tasks is a balance training tool for many ABLE Bodies activities, including this one.

Benefits »

- ⦿ Engages and integrates systems for balance.
- ⦿ Practices gait under varied conditions.
- ⦿ Negotiates obstacles.
- ⦿ Encourages everyday mobility.

Set It Up »

You'll need a clear, safe room to walk across; a route plan, including various obstacles, lighting conditions, and paths; and various distractions:

- ⦿ Something easily read while walking, such as large-print magazines, newsletters, a funny story or joke you've printed in a large font, or a list for treasure hunting.
- ⦿ Medium-size ball to juggle or toss.
- ⦿ Sunglasses or Heads-up glasses.
- ⦿ Planned obstacles.
- ⦿ Masking tape (for marking curbs and circles).
- ⦿ A short step (more like a real curb).
- ⦿ Items and a list for a treasure hunt.
- ⦿ Dog leash (a rope used to simulate the pull of a pet after a squirrel).

How to Do It »

Talk with participants about why this activity is helpful for balance and gait. Give them their mission and then get started.

- ⦿ Give them each a large-print magazine or a page that is easy to read as shown here.
- ⦿ Set up a treasure hunt (so they must walk with head turns to spot items). Make it as complicated or easy as you have time to do. Hunt for pictures of birds, animals, people (celebrities, presidents, police officers), and places (fountains, places of worship, homes). Clip the pictures from magazines and then spread them around the room at various heights. You can give them a list of items (read and walk), announce the items as they walk, or ask them to remember the list (cognitive task). Only use a few items, especially the first time, such as three animals, so you learn what works and how they like it.
- ⦿ Walk and juggle. Give participants one ball to toss from hand to hand, or if they have pockets, have them move their keys from one pocket to the other.



- ⊙ Jump (actually, take a big step) over a puddle or two (agility discs or taped circles).
- ⊙ Trudge through knee-deep snow (use their imagination; it's slow, big knee lifts with arm swings that help them while trudging forward).
- ⊙ Manage an escaping pet (as they walk by you, grab the leash, and tug it).
- ⊙ Walk around a public fountain (tape on the floor).
- ⊙ Walk along a curb (tandem line by a handrail).
- ⊙ Step up onto a curb (small step you've put out; have them use Belly Step Up, from Belly Button Training).
- ⊙ Walk with head turns to spot real or imagined sights.
- ⊙ Walk under a bridge (go through a doorway).
- ⊙ Vary the path pattern, directions, and pace.

Give It More Balance »

- ⊙ Walk up a few stairs or step over a few obstacles.
- ⊙ Pick up leaves or pinecones (or wadded-up paper balls as shown here).
- ⊙ Look up to spot a bird in a tree.
- ⊙ Look backward over the shoulder. (Walk along a handrail, one hand holding on. Look back over the outside shoulder.)
- ⊙ Walk at dusk (dim the lights).
- ⊙ Walk at high noon (wear sunglasses).
- ⊙ Walk sideways.
- ⊙ Advanced: Take off a sweater or put one on.



Keep It Safe »

Keep it simple. Use just a few options for the treasure hunt; too many can cause problems. You can present a variety over time. Cue participants to make plans and ask them what might help. Provide handrails and other touch supports (walls, counters) liberally.

Live It »

Hopefully, these tasks will help them get out there and enjoy their world and community. Practicing outside walking indoors can make that task a little easier.